

OPERATIONS CENTER/CURRENT SUPPORT GROUP

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CLOAK-AND-DAGGER ACTION: IS IT WORTH THE EFFORT?

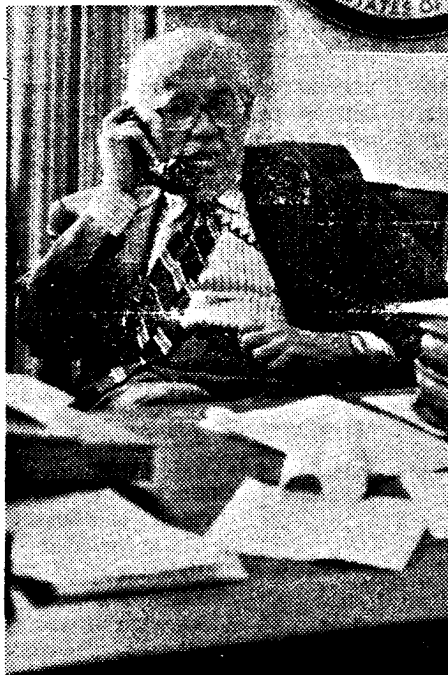
A wary Congress pulls on the reins*Last in a three-part series on secret operations***By Daniel Southerland**
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The Christian Science Monitor**Washington**

Despite reports of major CIA-supported operations against Nicaragua, the Reagan administration may be doing less in the cloak-and-dagger realm than some of its officials originally planned to do.

For one thing, the capability for such action had been reduced in recent years. Then there is always the danger that a secret operation will be publicly exposed, causing greater damage to the United States than any gains that might be made.

A Senate source says that it is the latter factor as much as anything that has enabled the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, headed by Arizona Republican Barry Goldwater, to persuade the administration not to go ahead with a number of apparently risky secret operations. The Senate and House committees on intelligence do not have the right to cancel such a proposed operation, but they do have to be consulted. They also have a say over the funding for the intelligence agencies.

Reports appearing for more than a year in the US press concerning CIA-supported raids into Nicaragua may have already had an inhibiting effect on those operations. The most recent reports indicate that the Honduran Army has been dispersing some of the border camps from which former Nicaraguan national guardsmen have launched raids. It was not clear whether this action was merely temporary. One reason for it may have been to avoid causing any embarrassment to President Reagan during his just-ended trip to South and Central America.

**CIA Director Casey**

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The Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, meanwhile, was reported to be asking for more information on the cross-border operations. In the House of Representatives, Congressman Michael D. Barnes (D) of Maryland, head of the inter-American affairs subcommittee, has introduced a resolution which would ban such covert operations. Mr. Barnes said he did not think the resolution had much chance of passing, but thought it might serve as a warning to those in the administration who were proposing such operations.

According to insiders, the original idea for a covert action more often than not comes from the executive branch and not from the US Central Intelligence Agency itself. CIA officials feel they have been badly "burned" by public exposure of their past abuses. They are not eager to relive the controversies of the 1970s.

For the CIA to proceed with a covert action, the President must find that such an operation is important to national security. This is the case even if the operation involves nothing more than planting an editorial in a foreign newspaper. Indeed, most covert actions consist precisely of this sort of thing, says one source. "Doing a little public relations," as he put it.

President Carter came to office sounding skeptical about secret CIA operations and seemed to have kept them to a minimum during the first part of his term. But frustration over the taking of hostages in Iran as well as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan caused the Carter administration to take another look at covert operations. According to a number of sources, Mr. Carter then authorized an increase in such operations, particularly in the propaganda field.

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Cloak-and-Dagger Action. _____

Because of his background, one would suspect that current CIA director William J. Casey would spend a good deal of time pondering the possible risks and benefits of secret operations. During World War II, as a Navy lieutenant and chief of secret intelligence for Western Europe in the Office of Strategic Services, Mr. Casey was in charge of dropping agents into Nazi Germany. But one source says under the Reagan administration and Casey's directorship, CIA covert operations are at about the same level as during the latter half of Carter's term.

Not surprisingly, Casey is reluctant to say much about covert action. He gives few interviews, and when he does, he prefers to talk about the less glamorous problem of collecting and analyzing intelligence. However, in an interview with writer David Wise, Casey suggested covert action under Reagan is a good deal more limited than many observers assume.

As reported in Newsday July 11, Casey told Wise: "I will say that covert action and special activities substantially increased during the last year or two of the Carter administration. Since then, covert action has been more narrowly focused on providing training and developing expertise to help friendly countries protect and defend themselves against terrorism and destabilization efforts from external sources."

Such a focus would not exclude training and financing of some units now launching raids from Honduras into Nicaragua.

In the view of some experts on Latin America, such actions are "counterproductive." Richard Newfarmer, an economist and senior fellow at the Overseas Development Council, says the administration's efforts should focus on economic solutions. He says that support for raids against the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua "gives hard-liners among the Sandinistas an excuse for further crack-downs inside Nicaragua. It also drives them closer to Cuba and to the Soviet Union."

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